

MRC Newsletter

Middleburgh Reformed Church PO Box 112 Middleburgh, NY 12122



Our Return to the Sanctuary

And let them make a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. Exodus 25:8

While finishing touches come to the Sanctuary, it reopened to welcome Sunday services in time for Christmas. All were certainly thankful to come back to this area of worship, feeling at home, and in strong communion with God. By the time this newsletter is published, the Sanctuary Committee expects to have

forwarded recommendations to consistory for pews and other furniture to complete this area. A re-dedication service is being planned, and that date will be announced soon. We are thankful to all for their tireless work and commitment in refurbishing this area. We are most grateful to God, for his gifts to each of us.

PRAYER CHAIN

James 5:16 says “..pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

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THANK YOU

This issue's photos courtesy of
Anne Marie Roesler, Jan Liberti
and Kim Smith

TO Mary Lou

May God be with you as you travel, carrying His word to others around the world.

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EXCEL 2013

Kim Smith



EXCEL 2013

Prayer Chain

A prayer chain is a group of people committed to praying for others and asking for God's healing power in their lives. As prayer requests are made, the information is passed along the chain and the prayers of God's people are set in motion.

The MRC has had a prayer chain for several years. To make a prayer request or to become a "link" in our chain you may contact Ellie Spencer (827 4448) for the phone tree or Jan Liberti (jliberti@mac.com) by e-mail. *Praying with others is a reminder that none of us is ever alone.*

Shawn and I with 8 teenagers from our Youth Group attended the Excel Conference in Saratoga on January 19 & 20. The conference was well attended with over 800 teens participating! This year's conference theme was "Flipped" and throughout the conference examples were given on how we can all live "flipped" lives. The teens participated in several seminars where they heard about topics such as Mission, Forgiveness, What the Bible says about...etc. We also attended General Sessions with the rest of the 800 attendees where we were led in worship by bands like Isaiah Six, led by Schoharie graduate Derek Levendusky. Jeffrey Dean spoke to us about how Jesus lived a "flipped" life. It was an amazing weekend for these

teens. After we returned we read their posts on Facebook: "Had the most fun and inspiring weekend ever!" "Had a great time at Excel!" "What a great weekend at Excel, had a blast!". They've already made plans to attend the conference again next year.

We'd like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to the Remembrance Tree Fund this year and to those who decided to grant those funds to the Youth Group this year. We were able to cover the cost of the 3 hotel rooms, reducing the financial burden on the families of the teens. Thank you!

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Our **OCC** shoeboxes have reached Zambia and Lebanon!!!

## INTERNATIONAL MISSION

Brian DeFeo

With the return of our long time missionaries from Hungary, the **Benevolence Committee** will be exploring possible future partnerships. We are pleased to bring you an update as to the missionary work of Sandy Wisner Rodriguez and her husband, Albino, who recently became RCA sanctioned missionaries. While both have previously served our Lord in Peru, they return this coming summer to embark on a brand new mission called La casa del Maestro, "The House of the Master". They will be working

with young people who are trying to make the difficult transition from Peru's rural outback to a more metropolitan setting. These youth are often taken advantage of for lack of resources, guidance, and faith. You may learn of this new mission by going to: [rca.org](http://rca.org) click onto global missions, missionary info, Once on Albino & Sandy's blog page you can go under Links and click onto their website to enjoy their testimony, vision, and request for prayer.



The Lord's Working Hands



Tireless, endless commitment

THANK  
YOU!



Quiet labor of love

## PROPERTY COMMITTEE

Leslie Hooper, Chairperson

If you check out the church website: [www.middleburghreformed.org](http://www.middleburghreformed.org), you will see pictures of our buildings after the flood and recovery reports from past newsletters. There are even a few pictures on the Middleburgh Reformed Church facebook page - reminders of how far we have come in our recovery.

We were able to start holding worship services in our sanctuary in December even though the balcony was still under construction. While the balcony was not flooded, it needed repair to its support system, and new stairs for safer access. It was decided to do some repair on the balcony floor as well. Thanks to Jim Snyder and help from others, the old carpet came up, holes were patched, and the floor prepared for painting and carpet. Pastor Jeff helped with the installation of our new sound system, one of many recovery projects he took on.

Once all construction items were removed from the foyer, church members helped to clean the bricks. **Doug Kingsbury** put a coat of sealer on the brick floor in addition to the many other things he does as our **Property Caretaker**. Ramp carpeting will go down in February once sanctuary doors are installed. Bookcases and cabinets will soon be installed in the library. A workday will be scheduled in the spring for attention to the yard and other spring chores.

Under our revised building use policy, those who use our facilities are responsible for their own set up and clean up which has helped us reduce our property costs. Building use forms and guidelines are posted next to the building use calendar, so those who wish to use our building will know what is expected. We are grateful to once again be sharing our building with the community, and we appreciate their donations given to help heat and maintain the building.

# THE PASTOR'S PEN



*The Corrections* by Jonathan Franzen is a marvelously written novel about a Midwestern family trying to be together for Christmas. It was an Oprah Book Club pick, which put me off. Mr. Franzen expressed concern that being picked would put men off the book. He was disinvited to be on the show for the comment, even though he was right. The novel begins:

“Ringing throughout the house was an alarm bell that no one but Alfred and Enid could hear directly. It was the alarm bell of anxiety. It was like one of those big cast-iron dishes with an electric clapper that send schoolchildren into the street in fire drills. By now it had been ringing for so many hours that the Lamberts no longer heard the message of “bell ringing” but, as with any sound that continues for so long that you have the leisure to learn its component sounds (as with any word you stare at until it resolves itself into a string of dead letters), instead heard a clapper rapidly striking a metallic resonator, not a pure tone but a granular sequence of percussions with a keening overlay of overtones; ringing for so many days that it simply blended into the background except at certain early-morning hours when one or the other of them awoke in a sweat and realized that a bell had been ringing in their heads for so long as they could remember...”

On the surface, they had it all: three kids, a good job; and good Midwestern life. But that's not all there is to life, and anxiety is a part it. The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, took anxiety as a sign that we are alive. Our modern chronic anxieties in America are usually not external- like war, famine, and plagues. They are internal. They are feelings and are produced and compounded by how we see and focus our attention. With the ‘reach for the stars’ optimism preached from the pulpits of power and halls of learning, what is keeping us down?

The insufficient gospel helps us to ignore the problem. The Gospel of the Cross of Christ says anxiety-internal and external- is a real threat to life. The Heidelberg Catechism is surprisingly relevant on this point. Written 450 years ago this year, it begins by asking: *What is your only comfort in life and death?*

This question can't be answered by someone else for you. We can't answer it for our children much to our chagrin, or our spouses, despite our efforts to change them, or our neighbors even though it would make us feel accomplished. God needs to answer it for you. What is your comfort? Where do you find protection and solace? Worshiping with other Christians is a reorientation to our anxieties. It needs to be weekly because our anxieties are daily. Prayer trains our heart to hear God's word to us. Reading Scripture exercises our imagination to God's reality. Not to the reality distorted by worry. Later this Spring we hope to have a Tuesday night discussion group for six weeks exploring some of these questions. Plan to come! (and YES, there will be food!)

*In Christ,*

**Pastor Jeff**



## ECUMENICAL FOOD PANTRY RUSS RYAN

Since our re-opening in February 2012, the food pantry has served 224 households for a total of 705 people. Although some of the households are repeaters, they are counted each time they use the food pantry. Our income comes from two basic sources: grants and donations. Thanks also to members of the community for their support of food and money. Our expenses are mainly for food supplies. We order from the Regional Food Bank in Latham and we buy from local stores to supplement food supplies that we need.

At present time, the Ecumenical Food Pantry is running very well. We are open Wednesdays from 4 to 6 PM and Saturdays from 9 to 11 AM, and by appointment when there is a need that cannot wait. Russ Ryan and Stan Roesler coordinate the volunteers, keep track of the inventory, and pick up food to fill the shelves. The Middleburgh Reformed Church supports the pantry both financially and by providing space in our fellowship hall. Members of our church and other churches in our community volunteer and are to be commended for giving of their time to this mission.



## NET DINNERS NEIGHBORS EATING TOGETHER

The themes of shared meals and hospitality appear often in Bible stories. As Christians we are encouraged to have fellowship with other believers, to feed the hungry, and to extend grace in all that we do. NET dinners afford us the opportunity to exercise these practices in our community. Since last fall, we have joined with other Middleburgh churches to serve a free meal on Thursday evenings.

NET dinners are hosted by the following churches:

Middleburgh United Methodist - 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday  
St. Mark's Lutheran - 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday  
Middleburgh Reformed - 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday  
Our Lady of the Valley - 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday  
Huntersland United Methodist (at M'burgh UMC) - 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday

Serving begins at 5:30. Dinners are not held on holidays such as Thanksgiving and holy days such as Maundy Thursday.

Since the dinners began, we have noticed positive results. A number of "seniors" are regulars, enjoying the evening out with friends as much as the food. We are serving some of those in our community who are having trouble making ends meet. Those who are hosting the meal have FUN working together!

If you haven't enjoyed a NET dinner yet, plan to do so soon. You will be treated to good food and good company. You will have the opportunity to visit with old friends and make new ones as you enjoy the hospitality of the host church.

You can be a part of extending hospitality to our neighbors on the third Thursday of the month by supporting the NET dinner at MRC in these ways:

**Assist with set-up, serving, and clean-up; Prepare a dish to share; Purchase needed food and beverage items; Make a donation toward the purchase of needed supplies; Share the meal and fellowship with our neighbors.**

Each month someone volunteers to coordinate our meal. That person will have a sign-up sheet at church. NET dinners will continue through May.

Dear Church Family,

A couple of years ago, Helene Spickerman and I were discussing Operation Christmas Child. She asked when I would be going on a shoe box distribution trip. I replied that it would probably never happen as those trips are offered to area coordinators. Helene's next comment remained with me and gave me a great sense of peace. She said, "If God wants you to go, He will make a way."

God has made a way! In May I will be traveling to Zambia with a group of OCC volunteers and Samaritan's Purse staff. I will be blessed with the opportunity to look into children's eyes as I place shoe box gifts into their hands. I will be able to see their country, visit their villages, talk with local pastors and teachers, and experience things I can't even imagine yet.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting Operation Christmas Child and for supporting me as an OCC volunteer. I ask you to please pray for the Zambia distribution trip. Pray that all of us who will be involved will be ready to serve in whatever ways God intends to use us to spread the Gospel and especially that children's lives will be changed for eternity.

I look forward to sharing my Zambian adventures with you!

Love,  
Mary Lou

## **STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE**

**Stan Roesler**

At our first meeting last September, a question arose, “**What is stewardship? What do we mean by Stewardship?**” After devoting our next few meetings to reviewing what the Bible had to say to us concerning Christian Financial Stewardship, we have now returned to the initial, bedrock question of what a “good” steward is and what faithful congregational stewardship might look like.

Leading stewardship authorities within the Christian community variously believe that **a Christian Steward is one who** *trusts God’s abundance, God’s provision; who confronts and overcomes his/her resistance to connecting financial decisions to faith issues; who acknowledges that everything s/he is and has belongs to God. We are stewards, not owners. This is good news because it means that God is ultimately in charge of us and our world and, as it turns out, God is much better at being in charge than we are.; one who lives gratefully, offering thanks to God in many simple but generous ways; is characterized by gratitude; is generous, not in a condescending way but out of a firm conviction that God’s gifts area to be shared freely with all our brothers and sisters in the family of God.”*

Another source suggests that “*being a faithful steward does not necessarily mean being a person who is a major donor to churches or charities, or being a person who is reluctant to spend money on his or her own pleasures and concerns. Rather, a faithful steward is a person who views this world as God’s good creation and is grateful to be a part of it; who knows that God cares for those whom God has made; who trusts God to provide him or her with whatever is needed to be content.*”

Similarly, **there are many different notions about stewardship** such as, “*holistic way of life – that we are stewards of our energy, our time, our money, our body; sacramental; only about planning next year’s budget; a word that conjures up very negative feelings – the horrors of home visits, building projects, financial campaigns, and the seemingly incessant harping of the churches for more money; the practice of faith through which people move from an awareness of acknowledgement that they belong to God, to an actual transformed existence through which they live out their faith in real and obvious ways; not just a way of life, but a good way of life; an opportunity to move beyond survival and more deeply into God’s mission. Our goal is to see our church as a sustainable mission outpost in God’s world.*”

**Our committee’s goal**, after we have prayerfully considered many perceptions of what stewardship is and what it is not, it to draft a tentative definition that seems appropriate for the Middleburgh Reformed Church. In that regard, we invite your participation. Please come to one of our meetings, and/or share your thoughts and suggestions with us via email or conversation.

**Thank you for thinking with us .**

**Donna Greenawald, Stan Roesler, Charles Shoemaker,**

**Stewardship Committee**

# Fellowship Committee

**Donna Wynia**

The Fellowship Committee is a group of volunteers who like to mix food and friendship. We arrange coffee hour sign-ups for after Sunday Service plus food and table set up for special events. Thanks to the kitchen and fellowship hall committees for doing a great job getting our kitchen and hall back together so we can provide these services.

Many events happened during the year, but last September we were touched to be asked to help with the reception following the funeral service for Helene Spickerman. Helene was always a major supporter of fellowship activities, and it was a true pleasure to be part of her family and friends that day. Her family did a wonderful job celebrating her life, in memory.

We will be holding a light brunch following our Annual Meeting on March 10, 2013. Our committee does not have a budget, so we rely on volunteers for food and donations for supplies. If you would like to help with this event, and perhaps any other fellowship activities, please call Donna Wynia (827 8110).



A NET dinner. Thank you to all who volunteered time and food!

## RIDDER RENEWAL PROCESS

In November, Mary Lou Ryan and I attended the two-day introductory event for **The Ridder Church Renewal Process**. The event was to give an overview for the New York and Albany Regional Synods. The process is a joint effort of the Reformed Church, Christian Reformed Church and Western Theological Seminary based on the work of Jim Harrington and Traisha Taylor.

The Ridder Sustaining team writes:

The church's transformation begins with personal transformation.

The Ridder Church Renewal Process helps leaders develop the tools to confront unhealthy models that have hindered personal and congregational growth. Participants make a 30 month commitment to personal faith renewal. Along the way they commit to courageous and authentic communication and to understanding the pressures that systems bring on individual behavior. They learn to develop non-anxious leadership styles, deal with conflict, and create effective teams. The Ridder Church renewal process says it helps leaders develop the tools to model healthy relationship and confront unhealthy ones.

We believe that congregations can make health changes toward God's preferred future by starting with high expectations, committing to learning over time, and building on the core values of integrity, authenticity, courage, and love.

The first event is March 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> in Houston for the pastors of participating churches. We have high hopes for this process and look forward to how God will use this work to further our life together. If you have any questions let me know. I look forward to sharing with you along the way.

**Pastor Jeff**

## CONSISTORY MEMBERS

### ELDERS

Sarah Bramer  
Charles Schoemaker  
James Spencer, Vice President  
Donna Wynia

### DEACONS

Brian DeFeo  
Leslie Hooper  
Stan Roesler  
Karen Miller

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

**Pastor Jeff Kelley** 827-8785, home email: [jeffa.kelley@gmail.com](mailto:jeffa.kelley@gmail.com)

**Church** 827-5134, office email: [reformed@midtel.net](mailto:reformed@midtel.net)

**Church Website** [www.middleburghreformed.org](http://www.middleburghreformed.org) AND Facebook

**Church Mailing Address:** PO Box 112 Middleburgh, NY 12122

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### COMING UP

**FEBRUARY 13:** Ash Wednesday, Lent begins

### **MARCH**

**8-10:** Breakout MS Youth Conference

**10:** Annual Congregational Meeting

**28:** Maundy Thursday Communion Service, 7PM

**29:** Good Friday Community Worship Service, 7 PM, the Reformed Church

### **EASTER SUNDAY MARCH 31**

**Easter Community Sunrise Service** 6:30 AM;  
Brunch immediately following at Methodist Church

**Easter Worship Service** 11 AM, Reformed Church

### WEEKLY SCHEDULE

- Sunday Worship: 11 AM
  - Sunday School and Choir: 9:45 AM
  - Youth Group: usually 7-8:30 Check with Smiths
  - Bible Study: Tuesdays, 1 PM
  - NET Dinners, Thursdays
  - Food Pantry: Wed 4 – 6PM, Sat 9-11AM, and by appointment, 827-7121
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### **Middleburgh Community Church Series**

The Historical Church Series last year was well attended and enjoyed by many so we are continuing it with another church series- this time music and liturgy. Each church will be able to share the hymns, songs, and elements of worship that are important to them. We will meet Mondays at 7 p.m. beginning April 22<sup>nd</sup> until June 10<sup>th</sup> (except Memorial Day). The exact schedule of the churches is still being planned.